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APCET at UN Decol. Comittee

Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET)

Statement to the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, July 13, 1994

Honorary Chair: Bishop Aloisius Nobuo Soma
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Mr. Chairperson and honorable members,

We thank you for allowing the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET), as represented by its secretariat based at the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), to convey the collective voice of representatives of the peoples in the Asia-Pacific who wish to see the dawning of freedom in East Timor.

APCET is a fresh initiative among civil libertarians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) in the Asia-Pacific. It is a formation that seeks to articulate the burgeoning fellowship among peoples in the Asia-Pacific with the embattled people of East Timor.

The coalition is temporarily based at the offices of the Initiatives for International Dialogue, an independent Filipino international NGO working for South-South solidarity. IID was instrumental in organizing the recent Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor.

Giving impetus to the birth of APCET is the indifferent, nay, amoral attitude of our governments with regard to East Timor. Political leaders in the Asia-Pacific region have chosen to remain silent to the patently illegal annexation of East Timor by the Soeharto military regime albeit relevant UN resolutions asserting the contrary. This duplicity has emboldened Indonesia to flay its power in the region and bully its neighbors.

This was starkly displayed when Soeharto recently arm-twisted the Philippine government on the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor. Indonesia threatened to withdraw billions of so-called potential investments in the Philippines. Seeking to appease Jakarta, Philippine president General Fidel V. Ramos moved to ban all foreign delegates to APCET. They even deported Nobel Peace awardee Mairead Maguire and included in the banned list the French First Lady Danielle Mitterand. Ramos' government capitulated to the extent of carelessly using subterfuge to bring about a court order banning the conference anywhere in the Philippines.

But the Filipino people and the peoples of the region were not to be denied their rights. We defied and asserted as the Supreme Court allowed the conference to proceed.

Indonesia's bullying of the Philippines and the latter's submission unleashed a diplomatic furore never before experienced among ASEAN states. The row was extensively covered by the international media. Instead of putting a lid over Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor, Indonesian pressure on the Philippines served to unravel the lie it sought to perpetuate particularly among the peoples in the Asia-Pacific.

Even in South-East Asian countries, East Timor was relatively obscure and isolated. During the Manila conference on East Timor, the barbarity and callousness of the Indonesian military regime's invasion and subsequent occupation of the territory was laid bare before its Asian neighbors.

These facts presented before APCET were stark and indisputable. No doubt, they have not escaped your attention. No doubt, they have been presented before you many times over by the seemingly countless discussions on the East Timor question. Thus we do not wish to benumb you with the number of East Timorese who were murdered due to what Indonesia terms as their "common brotherhood". Nor do we

need to remind the committee of the thousands of East Timorese who continue to bear the yoke of Soeharto's military oppression and exploitation.

But the peoples of the Asia-Pacific were horrified by what the conference revealed. To the representatives of peoples organizations and NGOs in South-East Asia, it was hard to comprehend how Soeharto and his military could murder 200,000 East Timorese and still hide this dastardly act from his neighbors. Disgusting too is that governments in the region chose to swallow the lie peddled by the Indonesian government. But what was most appalling was the apparent ineptitude of the United Nations to discipline a so-called leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia.

The United Nations was swift in its action against Saddam Hussein and was effective in its peace-keeping role in Angola, Namibia, and Cambodia, not to mention it's peace-making efforts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. APCET is therefore baffled by the UN's apparent idling on its task to resolve the conflict in East Timor. Compounding this perplexity is the fact that the General Assembly has already entrusted the Secretary-General with specific tasks as regards the status of East Timor as a non self- governing territory.

Even then, while we question the United Nation's apparent dilly-dallying and inutileness on the East Timor question, we also recognize its ability to enforce the consensus of the General Assembly on other fronts especially on the issue of non self-governing territories. (This is actually what behooves us!) We take cognizance of a number of such territories that have won the right to determine their own future in recent years with significant assistance from the UN.

The UN knows its obligation to enforce the sovereign right of the East Timorese people to design their own destiny. For certain, the United Nations will have to enforce the two Security Council resolutions and the eight others that were passed by the General Assembly in favor of East Timor in the soonest possible time.

Governed by this circumstance, we appeal to this honorable body to not only cast its attention to the proceeding themes but to sink their teeth to them as well. These are the requirements recognized by the Coalition as essential to the preservation of the East Timorese nation. We pray that the Committee take cognizance of the urgency of resolving the East Timor question and take the following recommendations as part of the steps that the UN shall undertake:

CEASEFIRE AND REFERENDUM

An immediate ceasefire between FALINTIL and the Indonesian occupying forces including complete demilitarization of East Timor must be implemented and a genuine peace process should be set in motion. While this is underway, a fair and honest referendum must also be held to determine the will of the East Timorese. All these must be done under the direct supervision of the United Nations.

While the UN is indispensable in executing such measures, the sentiments of the representative organizations of the East Timorese people must be given primary consideration. In this regard, the coalition expresses its support to the Peace Plan which was drafted by the National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM) and initiatives towards self-determination advanced by other genuine East Timorese groups.

RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

Steps must be taken immediately for the release of all East Timorese political prisoners. This call should be taken as part of a package of confidence-building measures. Among those who should be immediately freed is Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, Chairperson of CNRM and Commander-in-Chief of FALINTIL.

Freeing Mr. Gusmao is essential to the resolution of the conflict. He must be given a direct role in any negotiations regarding East Timor. Xanana Gusmao must assume a leading role in the East Timorese panel that will negotiate with the Indonesian government.

ON THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

APCET enjoins the UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Torture to seek and heed the voices of women in East Timor regarding atrocities against them, including sexual violence such as rape, being perpetrated by the Indonesian military in East Timor.

Likewise, Indonesia's forced birth control program and its aggressive family planning program should be investigated. The coalition views these measures with alarm in the light of reports that these are being used to terminate population growth among the East Timorese. The UN should also inquire into allegations that these measures are part of the "transmigration" program of Indonesia. Under this scheme, the rich culture and heritage of the East Timorese people will be obliterated.

To achieve the above recommendations, the United Nations should do everything within its mandate to expand access inside East Timor. Indonesia has already promised this to human rights and humanitarian organizations, media, and the UN special rapporteurs.

APCET enjoins the committee to take an expedient examination of the preceding propositions. It is further suggested that such measures be taken as part of the specific components of the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly. APCET fervently hopes that by doing this, the conflict in East Timor will be squarely addressed in the General Assembly's action plan to free all colonized people's by the 21st century. This will be a fitting accomplishment in this Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

Enacting them is certainly complex and difficult. The interests of the leaders of the world's biggest Muslim country obstructs the way. But isn't this the kind of dilemma that gave impetus for the establishment of the United Nations? To give all countries, big and small, powerful and powerless, strong and weak, equal opportunities before the bar of world opinion? Isn't it the UN's mandate to impose the full weight of international law upon recalcitrant states with the same dispatch and concern it did during the Gulf War?

The effectiveness of the United Nations rests upon common grounds that its member states are able to achieve. It was understandable then that finding such commonality was frustrated by the superpower rivalry which dictated the contours of international as well as regional politics during the Cold War era. The world has since regained that opportunity. However, the "end" of East-West tensions have instead only served to highlight regional conflicts caused by regional bullies like Indonesia.

The UN General Assembly and the Security Council have already spoken. It is time to apply the UN Decolonization Declaration in East Timor. Resolutions from both bodies attest so. What remains to be mustered is the political will to apply these resolutions and exercise the mandate bestowed by the UN Charter upon the member states to help colonized peoples gain their inalienable right to self-determination.

Yet despite the world's condemnation of its illegal occupation of East Timor, Indonesia adamantly clings to its claim over the territory. It has chosen to ignore the United Nations. It has chosen to ignore worldwide public opinion. It has chosen to run roughshod and blackmail its neighbors and force them to kowtow, nay, kneel to its demands.

We cannot, should not, allow this to happen.

Surely, it is the apex of hypocrisy for the United Nations and regional bodies such as ASEAN to tolerate the continuing persecution of the East Timorese while at the same time heaving a mouthful for peace and disarmament.

How much longer will this tragedy continue?

The answer is lurking somewhere within the halls of the United Nations.

The answer, partly, if not totally, actually rests upon this body's will.

Thank you very much.